

**International Pendulum Migration to Morocco:
Multi-Local Residential Strategies
of Ageing Migrants in the Todra Valley**

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past four decades, Morocco has evolved into one of the world’s leading emigration countries. Since the mid-1960s, Morocco has experienced large-scale migration of mostly unskilled migrants to western Europe. Moroccans form not only one of the largest, but also one of the most dispersed migrant communities in Western Europe. Out of a total population of 30 million, well over 2 million people of Moroccan descent lived abroad in 2000.

This migration was primarily oriented towards France, but also increasingly towards the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and, since the mid-1980s, Spain and Italy. The previous expectation that these ‘guest workers’ would return never materialized. Following the economic recession and the tightening of immigration policies after the 1973 Oil Crisis, relatively few Moroccan migrants returned. Migrant networks, combined with a sustained demand for migrant labour, explain why policies aiming to curb migration have had only limited effects (de Haas 2005a).

The 1973 Oil Crisis heralded a period of economic stagnation and restructuring, resulting in rising unemployment and a structurally lower demand for unskilled labourers. Consequently, western European countries closed their frontiers to new labour migrants. However, contrary to expectations, most migrants did not return, but ended up staying permanently. The Oil Crisis radically changed the political and economic context in which migration took place. Morocco suffered even more than the European countries from the high oil prices and the global economic downturn. The economic situation in Morocco deteriorated and, following two failed *coups d’état* against King Hassan II in 1971 and 1972, the country also entered into a period of increasing political instability and repression.

The discontinuation of this “return option” through the increasingly restrictive immigration policies, combined with the grim political and economic prospects in Morocco, explain why many migrants decided to stay on the safe side, that is, in Europe. Paradoxically, the recruitment freeze therefore stimulated permanent settlement rather than the reverse (Fargues 2004; Obdeijn 1993). In fact, the increasingly restrictive immigration policies interrupted the traditional, circular character of Moroccan migration. Although the social imagination of many Moroccan migrants has been long haunted by the “myth” of an eventual return to their homeland (Boudoudou 1985), most have been unable to realize this dream. Simultaneously confronted with severe social, political, and economic constraints and uncertainties in Morocco, as well as the increasingly restrictive migration policies in Europe, most opted for

family reunification. In fact, massive family reunification heralded this shift from circular to more permanent migration.

While family reunification was largely complete at the end of the 1980s, family formation gained significance as a major source of new migration from Morocco over the 1990s. For most Moroccans, marrying a partner in Europe has become the only option to enter the classic destination countries (France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany) legally. Large proportions of the second generation Moroccan descendants prefer to marry a partner — preferably kin — from the region of origin (Lievens 1999; Reniers 2001).

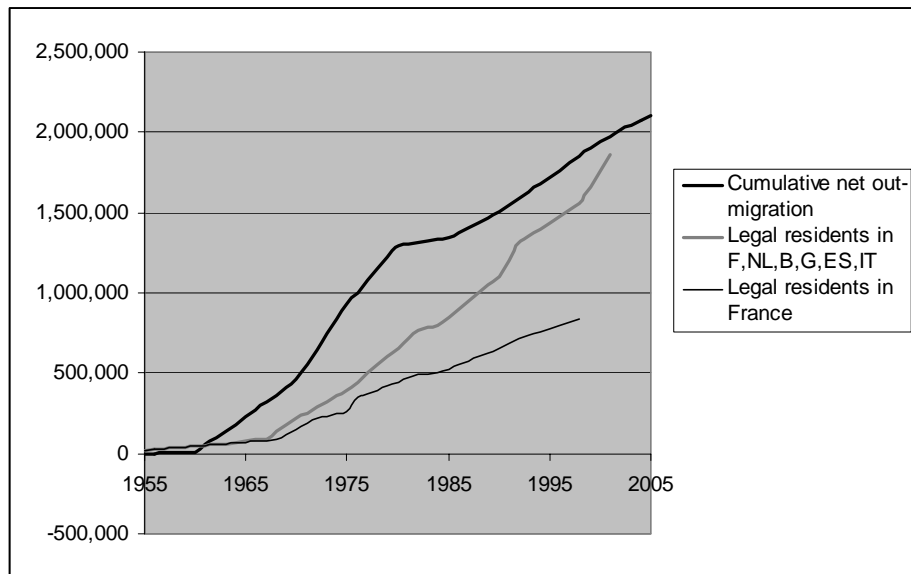
Besides the increasing reliance on family migration, a second consequence of the implementation of restrictive immigration policies was an increase of undocumented migration to the classic destination countries in western Europe. Especially during high economic growth in the 1990s, undocumented migrants were attracted by the increasing demand for cheap labour in agriculture, construction and the service sector. Undocumented migrants often manage to obtain residence permits through legalisation or marriage with a Moroccan or European partner in the destination country, that is, through “becoming” family migrants.

The third major development has been the diversification of migration destinations. Themselves former labour exporters, Spain, Italy and even Portugal have emerged as new destination countries since the mid-1980s. In southern Europe, Moroccans typically find employment in agriculture and construction, while a smaller group earn a living as merchants (cf. Huntoon 1998). The long coastlines of Spain and Italy make it relatively easy to enter those countries illegally. There is a persistent demand for unskilled labour in Europe, especially in the relatively large informal sectors of southern European countries and of Italy, in particular (cf. Fargues 2004; Huntoon 1998).

The combined effects of family reunification, family formation, natural increase, undocumented migration, and new labour migration to Spain and Italy explain why the number of Moroccans living in Europe has increased more than sevenfold from 300,000 in 1972, on the eve of the recruitment freeze, to at least 2.1 million around the turn of the century (see figure 1). This does not include the approximately 700,000 Jews of Moroccan descent living in Israel. The actual number may be substantially higher, due to undocumented migration. This is an average annual increase of more than 64,000. This also means that more than 7 percent of the total Moroccan population of 30 million were legally living in Europe.

In 2000, France housed the largest Moroccan population, comprising an estimated number of 840,000 individuals of Moroccan descent, followed by the Netherlands, with about 290,000 Moroccan ‘descendants’. Belgium, Spain and Italy housed communities of 155,000, 200,000 and 195,000 Moroccan migrants in 2001, respectively (De Haas, 2003; OECD, 2004). Germany (98,000), the United Kingdom (25,000) and Scandinavian countries (10,000) contain smaller communities. Also across the Atlantic, communities of Moroccan, mostly higher skilled migrants in the US (85,000) and French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec (70,000) have rapidly expanded (Collyer, 2004).

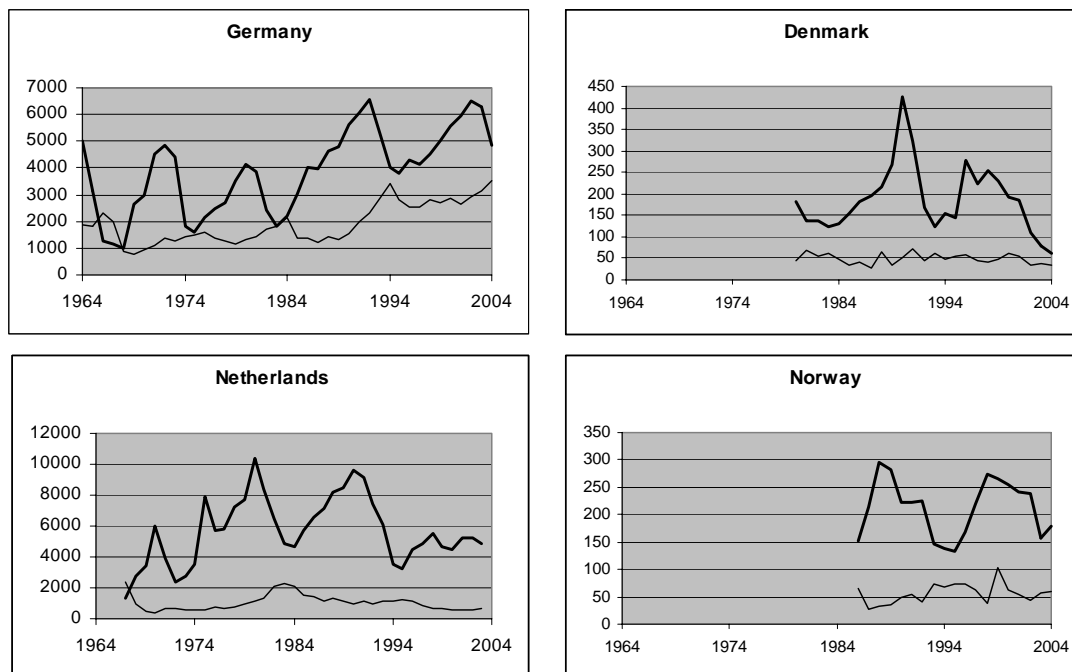
Figure 1. Expansion of population of Moroccan descent in Europe, specified for France (1955-2005)

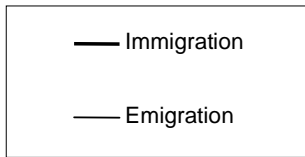


Source: National statistical services; De Haas 2003; Fargues 2005

Although the majority of labour migrants that arrived in western Europe during the 1960-70s migration boom ended up staying permanently, the late 1980s and early 1990s were characterized by a movement of return migration of relatively elderly, retired, or jobless Moroccans. Between 1985 and 1995, some 314,000 migrants returned to Morocco from France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, the UK, and Denmark. Since 1994, return migration has fallen to less than 20,000.

Figure 2. Emigration and immigration of Moroccan nationals





Sources: National statistical services

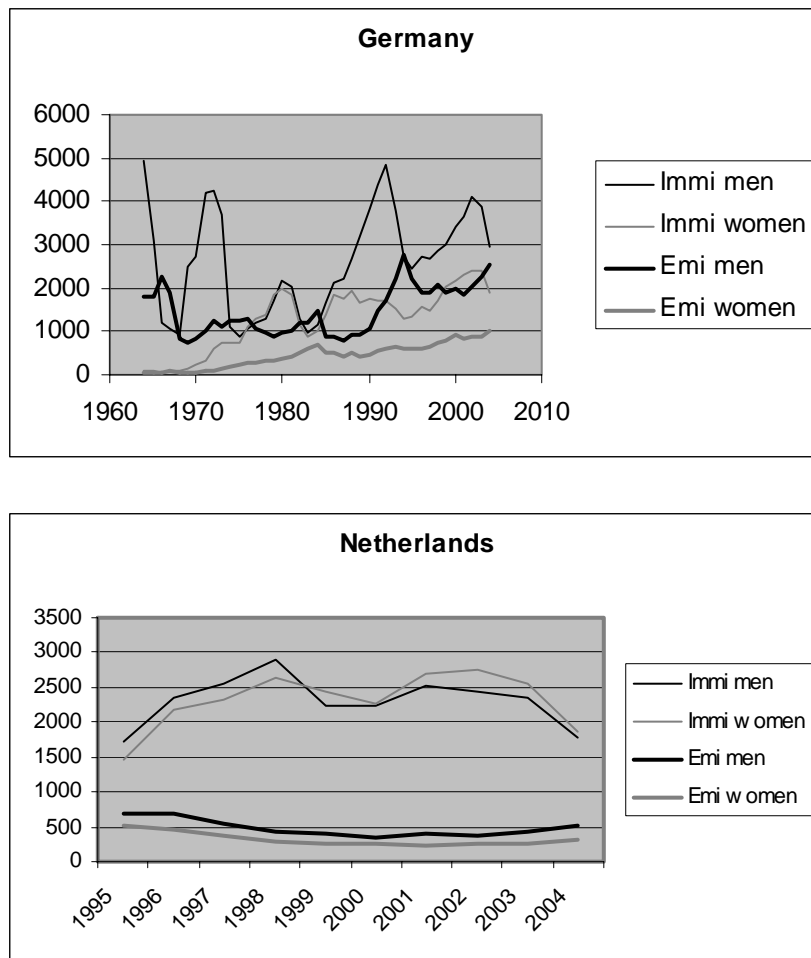
However, return migration among Moroccans has been low compared to other immigrant groups in Europe (Fadloulah *et al.* 2000:56). The permanent character of Moroccan migration is also testified by a high tendency towards naturalisation, especially among the second generations (Berrada 1990; Fadloulah *et al.* 2000:56). From 1992 to 2001 at least 430,000 Moroccans acquired the nationality of an EU member state, which is higher than among any other immigrant group in Europe (OECD 2004). Figure 2 displays immigration and emigration trends for a number of destination countries for which data on this topic was available¹. These country-level figures confirm the image that return migration has been comparatively low. It is however striking that out-migration from Germany has been considerably higher than from other countries. It might be the case that a proportion of these migrants do in fact not return to Morocco, but resettle in another European country.

Figure 3 reveals that return migration tends to be higher among men than among women, which seems to primarily reflect the fact that men are more numerous, in particular among the first cohort of migrants. Contrary what some might expect, the majority of Moroccan return migrants do seem to not belong to the elderly (see figure 4). For instance, 61 and 81 percent of all male and female migrants that returned between 1995 and 2004 from the Netherlands to Morocco was younger than 50 years.

At first sight, these figures suggest that ageing Moroccan migrants have particularly low tendencies to return. However, this general image of low return migration and permanent settlement in Europe obscures the fact that a growing category of ageing semi-returnees or pendulum migrants who can neither be classified neither as “settlers” nor as “returnees”.

¹ France, the most important ‘classical’ destination country for Moroccan migrants, does not register yearly emigration.

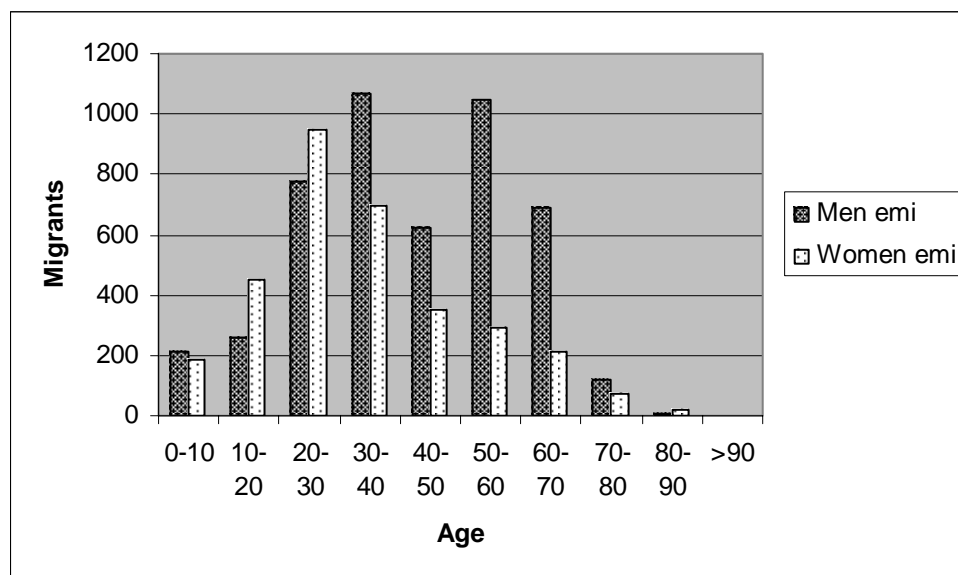
Figure 3. Moroccan migration from and to Germany and the Netherlands, by sex



Sources: National statistical services

While officially residing abroad in order to ensure their rights and maintain access to social benefits and health care, and generally living on social security benefits and state pensions, they tend to stay in Morocco for several months per year. In fact, many elderly migrants seem to simultaneously live Europe and Morocco, a fact which official migration statistics obscure. Some of these truly “transnational commuters” are active in commercial activities in Morocco. In migrant sending areas, they tend to settle in second houses in their native regions which they have massively built with the money they earned in Europe (see de Haas 2005b).

Figure 4. Return migration from the Netherlands to Morocco 1995-2004, by age and sex



Source: CBS Netherlands

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The remainder of this paper will describe the specific migratory behaviour of ageing Moroccan migrants in western Europe and analyse the structural legal, social and economic conditions which explain why ageing Moroccan migrants tend to develop this specific pendulum migratory behaviour. This will be achieved by analysing the situation of return and pendulum migrants in one particular Moroccan area of out-migration, the Todra oasis valley in southern Morocco. Data collection by the author in this region took place between September 1998 and June 2000. Following a participatory appraisal, a socio-economic household survey was conducted among 507 households containing 3,801 individuals, including 237 international (150 current and 87 returned) and 457 internal (292 current and 165 returned) migrants, in six villages. In addition to continuous participant observation, open interviews were conducted on migration, agricultural practices, investments and socio-cultural relations (see also De Haas 2003). In 2003, additional interviews were conducted among prospective and return migrants.

SHIFTING MIGRATORY STRATEGIES FROM THE TODRA VALLEY

The Todra is a small river oasis located on the southern slopes of the High Atlas Mountains in Morocco. In 2000 the valley housed approximately 70 000 inhabitants living in 64 villages and the rapidly expanding town of Tinghir (25 000 inhabitants).

Like most of rural Morocco, the Todra valley remained largely free of the central state power based in the cities west and north of the High Atlas until the 20th century. The installation of the French protectorate over Morocco (1912-1956) marked the beginning of an era of tumultuous change. The incorporation of this formerly stateless society of Berbers

(*Imazighen*) into the modern French and – after independence – Moroccan-Arabic state, meant the loss of tribal autonomy and the decline of regional and trans-Saharan (caravan) trade networks. Combined with a steep population increase, these processes have contributed to undermining traditional oasis livelihoods.

However, the transformation of the valley’s political and economic macro-context through the incorporation of the Todra into the modern state and the capitalist economy, along with the concomitant expansion of infrastructure and means of transport, created entirely new livelihood opportunities through wage labour outside traditional subsistence oasis agriculture both within and, in particular, outside the valley. These processes have culminated in the increasing importance of labour migration from the Todra.

From the second half of the nineteenth century, Todrawi went to work in the cities and on the farms of French *colons* in Algeria. However, French occupation of Morocco and the concomitant urbanisation created unprecedented opportunities for internal migration, mainly to coastal cities like Rabat and Casablanca. The combined effect of Algerian independence (1962) and the economic boom in Europe caused a reorientation of international migration flows, which shifted towards France and, to a lesser extent, Belgium and the Netherlands. The late 1960s and early 1970s were the golden age of labour migration, when workers were directly recruited, the costs and risks of migration were relatively low and a large number of relatively poor Todrawi were able to migrate to Europe.

Although formal labour recruitment came to an end after the mid-1970s, the Todrawi managed to adopt alternative strategies to migrate abroad. Several factors seem to explain the persistence of international labour migration. First, some migrants applied a migration strategy which has been referred to in the literature as “relay migration” (cf. Arizpe 1981). In this case, the migrant does not decide to reunify his entire household (i.e., his wife and children) at the destination, but to let only one or two unmarried sons come over before their age of legal adulthood² in what can be called “partial family reunification”. These sons then take over their father’s function as the migrant breadwinner after his remigration. In this way, the household maintains its “stake” in the international migration market. By passing the baton (i.e., the right to residency and work in Europe) from father to son, a new generation of labour migrants can be created via legal ways.

Family migration through new marriages with migrants has become virtually the only other way to enter north-west European countries (i.e., France, Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany) legally. Access to legal residency and thus to relatively well-remunerated work has increasingly become the prerogative of migrants’ children. This has coincided with a considerable rise in bride-prices. Although this practice seems to be declining now, many migrants wish to give their daughters to nonmigrants in marriage. Although migrants’ sons are generally freer in choosing their spouse, many end up marrying a girl from their village of origin too, under strong social pressure from their family and communities of origin.

Besides the increasing reliance on family migration, another consequence of restrictive immigration policies was a significant increase in undocumented migration. There also

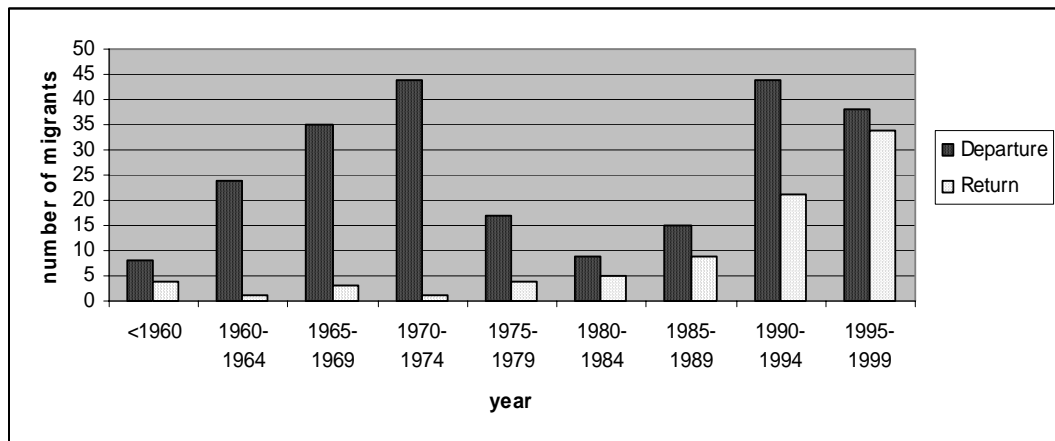
² Adult children generally do not have the right to immigrate to European countries on the legal basis of family reunification.

occurred a geographical diversification of migration flows after 1990, when Italy and, particularly, Spain emerged as new destination countries for legal and undocumented labour migrants. After a lapse between 1975 and 1990 – when family migration dominated – a surge in new “primary” labour migration to southern Europe has occurred (see figure 5).

Although France remains the main focus for international migrants (accounting for 61 percent of all surveyed international migrants) with significant migrant communities in Montpellier, Nice and Paris, destinations like the Netherlands (8 percent), the Arab oil countries (6 percent), Spain (13 percent) and Italy (4 percent) have grown in relative importance.

The temporary drop in labour-migration in the 1980s exactly coincided with the period when family migration peaked. Through family reunification, many migrants and their families departed definitively from the valley. Most international returnees returned in the 1990s, when the first generation of former ‘guestworkers’ started to approach retirement age.

Figure 5. Year of departure and return of “primary” international labour migrants³



Source: Household survey

DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF MIGRATION

Migration has become an all-pervasive phenomenon in the Todra valley. Half of the surveyed active male population (16-65 years) has been, or is involved in internal (22.0 percent current and 11.0 percent returned) or international migration (11.4 percent current and 3.6 percent returned). 20.1 percent of all surveyed households contained international migrants, 12.8

³ “Primary” labor migrants are migrants who obtained their residence permit on the legal basis of their work. Although people who migrate through networks claim residence permits on the legal basis of family reunification or formation often intend to work. It is therefore important not to artificially distinguish labor and family migrants. Such labor migrants “in disguise” can therefore be labeled as “secondary” labor migrants. However, family reunification normally implies the total disappearance of the household from the Todra, which means that such households cannot be interviewed. Furthermore, the distinction between primary and secondary migration is useful in the sense that primary labor migrants are more likely to settle in new destinations and to be the creators of new migrant communities abroad, whereas secondary migrants tend to follow the beaten track. Thus, in a way, the occurrence of primary migration is an indication of the degree to which new future potentials for network migration are created.

percent only contained international return migrant households. 7.5 percent of all surveyed households do not contain current or return migrants, but do regularly receive remittances from abroad. Taken together, 40.4 percent of all households are international migrant households of some sort.

25.0 percent of all household contain internal migrants but no international migrants, while only 34.5 percent of all households are non-migrant. This reveals the extent to which migration has become an integral part of the multi-local and multi-sectoral livelihood strategies of households. The economy of the valley is diversifying, with an increasing concentration of social and economic activities in Tinghir town. Even among non-migrant households, 86.2 percent have local non-agrarian sources of income. Only 4.3 percent of all households rely exclusively on agriculture.

International migration and remittances have significantly contributed to economic development, improved standards of living and enabled the partial emancipation of subaltern ethnic groups. International migrant households have a relatively high propensity to invest in housing, agriculture and other enterprises. However, several structural constraints such as corruption, complex administrative procedures, lack of legal security, economic uncertainty, and a generally perceived unreliability of the Moroccan state explain why many migrants decide not to return and/or not to invest, and, hence, prevent the high development potential of migration from being fully realised (cf. De Haas forthcoming 2006).

The migration literature gives overwhelming evidence that labour migrants across the world give a high priority to housing investments. The Todra valley is no exception to this rule. Simultaneously with processes of out-migration and high population growth, the Todra valley has witnessed the massive movement of people out of the traditional, fortified adobe villages (known as *igherman*; sing. *ighrem*) to new, more spacious, detached and generally more luxurious houses, which are generally built next to the ancient *ighrem*. Although the construction of new houses is a general process in the oasis, international migrant households have been at the forefront of this development. Almost three-quarters (74.0 percent) of all real estate investments are made by international migrant households and constructing a house is typically the first investment migrants make.

The importance attached to housing should primarily be explained by a quest for space, safety, privacy, fewer conflicts and better health. Interviews also revealed that women gain significantly in personal liberty through the establishment of new independent houses for their nuclear family – away from the authority of their parents-in-law. Secondly, housing is also a secure capital investment through which households are able to generate additional income through various lease arrangements. Furthermore, interviews revealed that house ownership also provides household “life insurance”. In the event of the death of the breadwinner or another significant loss of income, family members are guaranteed shelter and can gain rental income. This is particularly important in a society where most households do not have access to social security systems. 57.6 percent of the international migrant households have constructed second or third homes outside their native village. 24.8 percent of all houses are built outside the native village, in three quarter of the cases in Tinghir, the region’s sprawling urban centre.

The fact that the majority of investments are being done by *currently* abroad migrants exemplifies the degree of their transnational orientation, in which they try to maintain a simultaneous foothold in two countries. Investments in housing and businesses are also part of a strategy to prepare for the desired “return” to the native region after retirement. As we will illustrate in the following sections, this return is not necessarily a permanent, all-year-round return, but increasingly takes the form of a semi-return, pendulum behaviour, in which several months per year are spent in Morocco .

Over 70 percent of the international return migrants stayed more than 7 years abroad, and the average stay abroad lasts 18 years. Those who return earlier are generally migrants to Arab oil countries and undocumented migrants to southern Europe who were either expelled or did not find satisfactory employment (see table 1). However, other migrants consciously return at a relatively young with the intention to invest their money in their own enterprises.

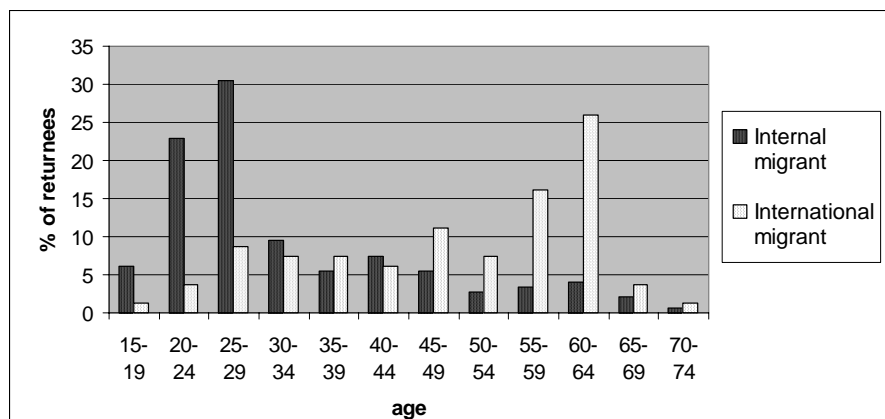
Table 1. Total migration duration of internal and international migrants

Migrant type	Total length of stay (%)					Total	Mean	n
	0-3	4-6	7-18	≥19				
Current internal migrant	37.5	17.9	36.5	8.1	100.0	7.5	285	
Current international migrant	17.4	17.4	22.8	42.3	100.0	15.7	149	
Returned internal migrant	24.7	32.0	30.7	12.7	100.0	8.2	150	
Returned international migrant	13.4	14.6	19.5	52.4	100.0	17.7	82	
Total	27.2	20.6	30.0	22.2	100.0	10.8	666	

Source: Household survey

The average age of international return migrants is 48 years in the year of return. However, if we take the mode as measure of central tendency, we come out at the 60-64 age category as the typical age on return (see figure 6). Thus, whereas the majority of international migrants in Europe have eventually reunified their families at the destination, a substantial proportion of international migrants has left their family in Morocco and has eventually returned. They make up 3.6 percent of the total active male population, against 11.4 percent for current international migrants.

Figure 6. Age on return of internal and international return migrants



Source: Household survey

Two thirds of the current returnees returned in the 1990s. This corresponds with the aging of the first generation migrants who left to Europe during the migration boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Three decades after the Oil Crisis, the first generation of European migrants is approaching the age of (pre-) retirement. Those who reunified their families in Europe do seldomly return permanently, not in the least because their children (who were mostly raised and educated in Europe) and spouses (who generally enjoy more rights and freedoms abroad) often oppose the idea.

The limited social and economic opportunities in Morocco and the integration⁴ of migrants' children in Western European society explain why the expectation of return has turned into a myth for most migrants. However, the minority who did not decide to transfer their families during the family reunification wave in the 1980s, returned in the late 1980s and 1990s. Early return migrants generally came from Algeria, and ten percent of recent returnees have worked in Libya and, to a lesser extent, Saudi-Arabia. Migrants to Arab oil countries are generally not allowed to stay and work on temporary contracts.

However, a substantial and growing group of the majority of elderly “non-permanent returnees” seem to develop mobility patterns of semi-return or “transnational commuting”, which blur the classical, primarily juridical distinction between settlers abroad and return migrants.

23 households (representing 12.2 percent of all households participating in international migration) were officially ‘empty’ because all household members officially lived in Europe, while at the time of the survey one of the, usually older, ‘commuting’ household members was actually present. Although they were not considered to be part of the survey population, this is in fact an arbitrary choice regarding the *de facto* transnational character of such households.

Table 2 shows the number of months the different categories migrants stayed abroad during the 12 months prior to the survey (for current migrants) or during the last year of their migration (for return migrants). It reveals that among international migrants, the mean number of months they stay abroad annually is somewhat inferior to 10. This figure is much lower than expected, as summer holidays generally last between 4 and 6 weeks, and not all migrants return each year. 24 percent of current international migrants stayed in Morocco for 3 months or longer, whereas also 28 percent of officially returned international migrants stayed 3 months or longer in Morocco in the last year of their stay abroad.

⁴ Despite the fact that the integration of Moroccans is perceived as problematic by many Europeans, it should not be ignored that, in Moroccan eyes, migrants' children have become westernised to a large degree. The overwhelming majority of the second generation youth, who generally speak better French or Dutch than Berber or Arabic, feel so alienated from everyday Moroccan society that they cannot imagine living in Morocco.

Table 2. Number of months of absence during last year of migration

Migrant type	Absence in months during last year of migration (%)						
	0-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	Total	Mean	<i>n</i>
Internal migrant	10.6	19.2	38.4	31.8	100.0	7.8	292
International migrant	3.3	6.0	14.7	76.0	100.0	9.8	150
Returned internal migrant	9.1	15.2	33.9	41.8	100.0	8.0	165
Returned international migrant	3.4	8.0	17.2	71.3	100.0	9.6	87
Total	7.8	14.0	29.5	48.7	100.0	8.5	694

Source: Household survey

This becomes even clearer if we examine the relation between the age of migrants and the numbers of months spent in Morocco during the last year. Whereas among migrants between 15 and 29 years only 7 percent spent at least 3 months in Morocco, this proportion neatly increases with age, and amounts to 19.6 percent among the 30-44 years old and 33.3 percent among the 45-59 years old. Among migrants over 60 years old, 55.6 percent spends at least 3 months per year in Morocco. Among *male* migrants this percentage is even 62.5 percent. 22.2 percent of elderly migrants spent at least 6 months per year in Morocco. It is almost exclusively male migrants who spend at least 3 months per year in Morocco.

The high average stay in Morocco can be explained by the long period spent in Morocco by a category of relatively aged international migrants who still officially reside abroad, but who no longer work. This group of unemployed, retired or (partially) disabled migrants generally lives on social security benefits, and some of them tend to commute between Europe and Morocco, where they stay for longer periods. Some of these truly “transnational commuters” are active in trade activities in which they bring consumer goods or cars from Europe, and take back from the Todra local products such as olive oil. Other migrants give people rides back to Europe or smuggle undocumented migrants across the Gibraltar Strait in their small vans, locally known as *transits*.

Although numerous international migrants gain an additional income by trading goods and transporting people during the yearly summer holiday, during which migrants massively visit the Todra valley, this has become a veritable way of life for some—generally older—migrants. Several *transits* commute between the Todra and Montpellier, the main migration destination in France, on a weekly basis. Such “commuters” seem to be primarily migrants living in southern France. The relatively short distance from Morocco to Mediterranean cities such as Montpellier and Nice facilitates this behaviour. It is only one day’s travel from Gibraltar to southern France compared to at least two days to northern France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

Long-term international migrants who do not cut ties with the household of origin typically return towards the end of their working age, in their fifties or early sixties. Subsequently, their children may start the cycle again, either through ‘relay migration’ or by marrying kin abroad. Most of the international migrants who left in the late 1960s and early 1970s migration boom had either reunified their families or returned home at the turn of the century. However, classic distinctions between permanent and return migration are now becoming

increasingly blurred, and we are witnessing the emergence of transnational Todra communities that maintain intensive contacts with either side of the Mediterranean.

The large majority of these commuters are men, who typically leave their spouses and children behind. In a way, we are witnessing a reversal of residential strategies over time. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s the male “guestworkers” who left their families behind in Morocco, we now witness the re-emergence of transnational households after a phase after reunification in Europe, in which the ageing migrant workers leave their spouses and children behind in Europe for part of the year. In each of these cases, it is the migrants’ spouse who bears the main responsibility for the persistence of the household in general and child rearing in particular. Patriarchal values valuing such typical women’s roles explain the relative immobility of female ‘family migrants’ compared to male ‘labour migrants’.

THE RATIONALE OF PENDULUM MIGRATION

The permanent return to Morocco is generally conceived as too risky, and there are in fact very few reunified household that return to Morocco as a whole. The main explanation of this phenomenon is the reluctance of migrants’ spouses and, in particular, children to return. Most male migrants themselves realise that return of their children is no viable in view of the superior educational and job opportunities in Europe.

This perception is being reinforced by the relative failure of the strategy pursued by migrants that preferred to leave their children in Morocco and did not decide to reunite their families in order to offer their children a higher education and a professional career in Morocco. Besides fears that their children offspring would become “spoiled”, “westernized” or “drunkards” in Europe, and having themselves experienced the often problematic position of migrants in Europe⁵, several migrants reasoned it would be better not to expose their children to potentially humiliating positions. Many international migrants from the Todra who decided not to reunify their families in the 1970s and 1980s did so because they assumed it would be a better strategy to invest in the higher education of their children (i.e., sons) in Morocco, which would enable them to live secure and comfortable lives as civil servants in Morocco.

However, this strategy has often failed since, in the meantime, it has become increasingly difficult for university graduates (*licenciés*) to find a job due to severe budget cuts in the public domain, the general economic downturn, misguided educational policies, and the general surge of the number of young people holding higher education degrees. Within the

⁵ Possibly, international migrants who have not reunified their households also tend to have more negative experiences living and working in Europe.

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household survey sample, unemployment rates⁶ among higher educated people in international migrant households vary between 18 and 25 percent (see table 3)⁷.

Table 3. Unemployment rates by educational level, by household migration status

Household migration status	Unemployment rate by educational level (>15 yrs) (%)					
	No	Primary	Lower sec.	Higher sec.	Higher	Total
Nonmigrant	2.2	3.7	1.4	3.2	0.0	2.6
Internal	1.0	1.7	6.9	0.0	15.0	3.1
Indirect international	1.2	1.9	0.0	6.7	27.8	4.4
Current international	2.8	3.3	7.3	3.9	25.0	4.8
Returned international	3.9	2.8	10.4	5.3	18.2	5.4
Total	2.1	2.8	6.0	3.4	18.3	3.8

Source: Household survey

Most jobless graduates are forced to return to the Todra to stay with their families. This is generally perceived as an extremely frustrating if not humiliating experience. They find it dishonourable to remain dependent on their parents and to be unable to marry. Boredom and bitterness characterize their existence. These unemployed young men now form Todra’s share of Morocco’s “detached middle” (cf. Cohen 2001)⁸. The unemployed sons (and daughters) of international migrants tend to be full of resentment vis-à-vis their fathers who did not allow them to join them in Europe. The international migrants themselves, confronted with the broken ambitions of their children, tend to regret their choice not to reunify their families in Europe. For them, their educational investment strategy has apparently failed.

Confronted with the lack of perspectives in Morocco for their children, several migrants who initially did not reunify their families decide so on the last moment when this is legally possible, that is, just before their children attain adulthood. Through this ‘now or never migration’, families are sometimes torn apart.

⁶ Note that in the Moroccan context, “unemployment” is a concept with a limited significance. In fact, many people are “underemployed” in the sense that they only work from time to time, depending on the availability of—mostly temporary—employment.

⁷ This reflects the general Moroccan pattern of high unemployment among the young and higher educated. The two basic reasons for their inactivity are the lack of proper employment opportunities as well as the financially secure position of their households, a situation which allows them to refuse semi- or unskilled work. More generally, the mediocre quality of higher education, the gap between the type and level of education and labour market needs, government budget cuts, and relatively low economic growth have all negatively affected the access of young, higher educated Moroccans to the labour market.

⁸ Mass unemployment and frustration among a new generation of relatively well-educated youngsters is a general problem in Middle Eastern and North African countries, and this might be one of the major explanations for the growing (religious and ethnic) radicalism in the region. In this context, Richards (2003:6-7) argued that “Government policies have not only reduced the rate of growth of demand for labor, but have also fostered inflexible labor markets. Decades of government job guarantees for graduates have induced students to seek any degree, regardless of its utility in the production, since a degree, by itself, has long been a guarantee of a government job. Governments cannot now provide the necessary jobs, but statist policies impede private sector job creation.”

Jamal, 20 years old, for instance, was left alone in Morocco. “My father works in Nice since 1969. He never wanted to take his family to France. He was afraid that we would become *Nsara* [Christians] until he suddenly changed his mind when he realised there was no future in Morocco for us. But I was already too old. My mother, brothers and sisters left me here alone. I do not know what to do. I see no solution.” He now lives alone in the large family house. He put all his hopes on obtaining a scholarship at a French university, which would allow him to join his family.

When migrants’ children living in the Todra had already reached adulthood, and cannot legally go to Europe through family reunification or family formation, they frequently try to migrate on their own steam. In fact, many young men (and, increasingly, women) that now migrate to Spain and Italy are children of international migrants that decided not to reunify their families.

For instance, consider the case of Ahmed Idir, who in June 1970 in the Dutch town of Alkmaar after having worked in the coalmines of Pas-de-Calais in northern France for 8 months, work for which he was directly recruited in the Todra.

The work in the mine was extremely heavy, and through friends he eventually arranged a work contract for a local cheese factory in Alkmaar where other members of his tribe (Ait ‘Atta) were already working. He invested the money he earned in building a large, two-storey house suited for his future extended family – his sons, their spouses and their children – and the purchase of agricultural land in the oasis.

He decided not to reunify his family in the Netherlands, but he now regrets this choice, because his children could not find work in Morocco: “I have made a mistake, but when I realised this it was already too late”. In 1995 he decided to return permanently. However, his three sons (who are between 18 and 28 years old) did not find work in Morocco, and now all had illegally migrated to southern Europe, two in Spain, and one in Italy, where they work in the construction industry. Thanks to recent legalisation campaigns, they have obtained residency permits. Two of his three daughters are married, one with a villager who is illegally working in Spain since 18 months. Two of his three sons will marry when they return during the summer holiday.

According to Ahmed, “their spouses and children will follow them quickly, as soon as possible. That is better. That is the big mistake I made. It is better for them. If you return home after a day working, and talking Dutch to your mates, it is delightful to have a girl at home. She can also cook, and clean the house. Then you are “returned” in Morocco, which is a real pleasure. It is also better for the children”

Although Ahmed regrets his own choice not to reunify his family, he enjoyed the fact that his own children “do well”, as if they restored his own mistake. During the ride [I gave Ahmed a lift in my car] Ahmed was called two times

on his mobile phone [most Moroccans possess a mobile phone nowadays] by one of his sons in Spain and his daughter’s migrated husband.

Despite the fact that he had not been in the Netherlands during the past decade he wished to return during the next summer. Ahmed told me that return migrants from Holland can benefit from a special visa scheme, but that there is a yearly quota. He was on the waiting list for several years, but he thought it would now be his turn. On this occasion, he not only wanted to visit his four co-villagers who settled in Alkmaar, but he also planned to visit family and friends living in Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Disappointing experiences by returned migrants seem to deter current migrants from returning permanently.⁹ Ageing migrants subsequently tend to develop multi-local residential strategies, in which they spend several months per year in Morocco and Europe, while keeping their legal residence in Europe.

Mohammed migrated in 1968 to Montpellier in France. His wife and children followed him in 1976. He is jobless since 1990, and will officially retire within a few years. All his daughters are married now, two of his three sons are still studying at university. He originally had the plan to begin a large agricultural enterprise upon return. He even bought the land and installed a water pump. But the fact that his children were married, working and studying in France made him realise that it was impossible to return permanently. He now spends half of the year in Morocco to run his agricultural enterprise. During the months of absence, his brother ensures the management of his small farm, where he produces almonds and wheat. While he returns to France, he takes a local produce (mainly almonds and olive oil) to France. On his way back, he takes electronics to sell at the local market. He only lives in one part of his two-storey house in his native village. The vacant rooms are inhabited by his brother and his family. During the summer holidays his wife and children visit his native village, but his single sons generally remain only for a couple of weeks, after which they travel around in Morocco as ‘tourists’ before returning to France.

The significance of these multi-local residential strategies of pendulum migrants is reinforced by the experiences of permanent return migrants who tend to regret this choice. Return migrants also perceived that their “guaranteed” rights have been severely curtailed since they returned to Morocco. Migrants’ are generally reluctant to give up their established rights in Europe while taking significant social and economic risks implied in return migration. Negative experiences by earlier return migrants and the concomitant perceived unreliability of European states play an important role in explaining this reluctance.

⁹ This also appears to be a partial explanation for the fact that migrants increasingly decide to reunify their families at the destination.

The progressively restrictive European immigration policies governments have made it increasingly difficult to pay family visits, mostly because of costly and lengthy visa application procedures. Moreover, changes in social security regulations and increasing limitations exportability of social security benefits often have, sometimes unforeseen, negative repercussions for return migrants.

For instance, the new Dutch medical insurance law, which was introduced in January 2006, obliges any person receiving Dutch state pensions or other social security benefits to participate in the new national obligatory medical insurance scheme. This also applies to Moroccan return migrants permanently living in Morocco, which have to pay the high monthly contributions – which are based on Dutch standards and costs – while they have no access to Dutch health care facilities. Moroccan public health care facilities are much more limited and also considerably cheaper. As a consequence of the new law, many migrants living on small (partial) state pensions will lose a large part or even their entire income.

The fact that the Dutch government informed the return migrants on the new law by sending them Dutch-language letters seems characteristic for the Dutch government’s apparent inability to comprehend the concrete situation in which Moroccan return migrants live. Most return migrants are illiterate or do not sufficiently understand Dutch to understand the complex new regulations. Moreover, application forms for the new insurance scheme were not sent with the letter, but have to be requested via a website. Such ‘unpleasant surprises’ and the negative experiences of returned migrants appear to deter still abroad migrants, who prefer to develop a pendulum migration behaviour instead of returning permanently.

In addition, many migrants have built up only partial claims to social security, on which they hardly survive alone. For instance, migrants tend to have only partial access to European state pensions because they only spend a part of their active life in Europe. Most Moroccan migrants have saved little or no money in private pension schemes. In many cases this implies that they would fall back to poverty if they would rely on social security only. Therefore, elderly migrants increasingly rely on and count on support by their children. Finally, the superiority and general accessibility of public health care systems are a major reason of not giving up residency rights in Europe. This all explains why migrants have a vested interest in maintaining a firm legal and social foothold in Europe.

Although ageing male migrants often cling to their wish to return permanently, this desire is generally obstructed by low incomes and the reluctance of children and spouses to return. Especially for nonworking Moroccan women, their children tend to represent their major form of social security since they generally have limited claims to social security and pensions. Consequently, many ageing migrant men develop a commuting migratory behaviour. Women only tend to join them in this type of mobility once all their children are independent.

For women, migration to Europe not only implies an important improvement in their economic situation, but also in their legal and social position. To a certain extent, this may explain why migrant women seem less willing to return to Morocco than men. It can therefore be hypothesized that (legal and social) gender inequality decreases the propensity to return among migrants and increases the tendency towards family reunification.

Besides a generalised distrust towards the Moroccan State apparatus (*makhzen*), there is a general lack of trust among international migrants in the institutions of the destination countries. Confronted with a political discourse that has become progressively hostile towards immigration and with increasingly restrictive immigration policies and laws, ageing migrants fear that by resettling in Morocco they will give up their acquired rights in Europe. This fear of not having the option to return to Europe in case of failure in social (adaptation) or economic terms seems to decrease their propensity to return.

CONCLUSION

This migratory behaviour and the ensuing re-emergence of transnational, multi-local households, can be interpreted as a strategy trying to reconcile the reluctance of children and, to a lesser extent, spouses, to return and the interest in maintaining social and economic ties with Morocco, while holding a firm legal, social (security) and economic foothold in Europe in the interest of escaping from social exclusion and avoiding falling back to poverty. Besides their reliance on their children, the partial non-exportability of social security and pension benefits impedes permanent return and hinders people from returning and circulating freely.

The “volatile” (i.e., unreliable) European immigration policies have probably also played a role in decreasing the tendency among migrants to return. Increasingly restrictive immigration policies have not only had the “perverse” effect of interrupting circular migration patterns and actually decreased people’s tendency to return (cf. Entzinger 1985). They have also added to the feeling that immigration policies will become even more restrictive in the future, and that today’s guarantees on return—for example concerning the right to temporary visas or to migrate again or the level of social security benefits—will only have limited and temporary value. This lack of trust largely explains why many migrants cling to their acquired European residency rights.

From the Moroccan perspective, a European residence permit is a key asset, a “gold mine” giving access to the European labour market, social security systems and public health care. This asset is therefore fostered and preferably passed on to following generations. For female migrants, an additional reason not to return is that they enjoy better rights in Europe. For migrants’ children, it gives them access to European education systems and labour markets.

In general, Moroccan migrants are operating in institutional environments that they perceive as untrustworthy or even hostile on either side of the Mediterranean. This makes them extremely risk-averse and prudent about giving up their hard-won rights in Europe. Guaranteeing access to social security and future support of the children seem to be key factors in explaining this pendulum migration behaviour. While many ageing migrants do in fact have the wish to return, political, economic and social uncertainties do withhold them from doing so. Therefore, guarantees on the right to migrate again as well as improved and guaranteed exportability of social security benefits, especially in the field of health care, are indispensable if governments wish to offer migrants a genuine choice to return.

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